



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-New Legs for Shahad: Soldiers, PRT Help Iraqi IED Victim-

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Diyala Province, Iraq - It is the greatest tragedy of any conflict that children are killed and injured. And victims like 10 year-old Shahad Abbas Aiez, who lost both legs to an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in November 2007, are proof that Iraq is no exception.

It was a roadside IED explosion in West Baqubah, Diyala Province that forever changed the life of Shahad and her family. She and her younger brother Ali were walking home from school when a bomb placed near a busy traffic circle detonated severely injuring them both.



Dr. Ail H. al-Tamimi confers with Shahad and her mother before their flight to Baghdad for prosthetics fittings.

After the explosion the two youths were rushed to Baqubah General Hospital for treatment. Shahad's legs were badly damaged and her torso was peppered with shrapnel. Her chances for survival appeared slim.

In various forms IEDs have been the cause of a large number of innocent casualties. Sometimes the IEDs are buried in a road and an unsuspecting child detonates it. Sometimes the child is playing near the detonation site. And sometimes the terrorists use a toy to lure children and others to the bomb.

Doctor's originally believed that Ali's injuries had been less serious but after four days in hospital he died. Shahad however clung to life and slowly began to recover. Her struggle for life was not without a price, doctors were forced to amputate both of her legs several inches below the knees and several pieces of shrapnel remained lodged in her back and abdomen.

Life in agricultural Diyala can be hard enough with drought, limited job opportunities, and poorly maintained infrastructure and now the terrorist attack had made it even harder for Shahad's family with its limited income.

Shahad's father, Abbas Aiez, transports merchandise to the local market each day in his small donkey cart while his wife, Waheda Jabbar, manages the small home where their family of twelve live modestly on Abbas Aiez's earnings. Additional medical care for Shahad was not something the family could afford.

The traffic circle and neighborhood where Shahad and her family live are in the battle space of the 1/38 Infantry battalion of the 4/2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team stationed at Forward Operating Base Warhorse in Diyala.

Several weeks after the attack, Staff Sergeant Luis Falcon was leading the "Ghost Riders," 3rd Squad of Bravo Company's 4th Platoon on a routine foot patrol when they located the family.

After meeting Shahad whose wounds had not fully healed, Falcon and the other Ghost Riders did what so many other U.S. service men and women have done in their own battle spaces across Iraq, they began to provide assistance to the family out of their own pockets.

Winters are cold in Baqubah, 4th Platoon supplied fuel for heating and electricity. Fresh water was in short supply, 4th Platoon provided it. The public distribution of food supplies is irregular, 4th Platoon made sure Shahad and her family had enough to eat. And in addition to the necessities of daily life, the Ghost Riders acquired a wheelchair for Shahad from a local pharmacy.

As Americans we have come to expect this sort of thing from our troops. But Falcon and the other Ghost Riders wanted to do more. They wanted to fulfill Shahad's greatest wish. They wanted to help her get new legs so she could return to school.

As American's we have come to expect that at this point in the story some philanthropist or celebrity or children's hospital will burst onto the scene and offer to pay all the expenses for rehabilitative care in the United States.

That is not what happened, and it is something unlikely to happen for the scores, or hundreds, or maybe even thousands of Iraqi children who, like Shahad, have been injured in terrorist attacks.

Here's what did happen. Captain Joshua Wiles, 4th Platoon's leader informed Battalion Chaplain Captain Kevin Hovan of Shahad's situation. Hovan passed word to Jerry Gardner the Public Health Advisor at the Embassy's Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Diyala.

Gardner contacted Dr. Ali Hussien al-Tamimi Director General of the Diyala Directorate of Health, and Brigadier General Samir Hussein Surgeon General at the Ministry of Defense. Hussein in turn called the International Zone Prosthetics Clinic in Baghdad and together they scheduled an appointment for Shahad to be fitted for prosthetic legs at the clinic.

The clinic is a joint Iraqi-American operation and is staffed by medical personnel from both countries. In July the clinic is scheduled to be turned over fully to the Government of Iraq.

The PRTs and their Coalition partners are playing a crucial role in this phase of Iraqi reconstruction. They are moving from the bricks and mortar projects of the past and are now focusing on capacity building. In this case, helping the Iraqis to connect with each other and advising the provincial officials of resources available to them within the Iraqi central government.

As more operational control is handed over to the Government of Iraq it is essential that the Government be adequately prepared to manage its own programs. Sometimes the only barrier to success is a few missing pieces of information.

PRT Diyala was able to provide that information for Shahad and now that the various Iraqi levels of government are working together they will be able to handle future cases on their own. Shahad will be the first to pass through the newly opened door but many more should be able to follow her in the coming months.

This chapter of Shahad's story ended on a positive note. Shahad and her mother met with Dr. Ali on 8 May as they prepared for their trip to Baghdad. He assured them of his ongoing personal interest in Shahad's progress and promised to meet with her again after she received her new legs.

Doctors at the Prosthetics Clinic fitted Shahad for her legs on 9 May; and by that afternoon she had them and had taken a few steps. She should be on track to return to school when the new term begins in September. Shahad hopes to continue with her schooling all the way through university and medical school so that she can help children who need medical care.